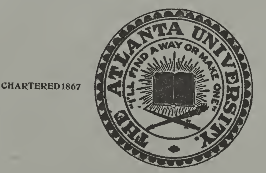
Webster

The Atlanta University Bulletin

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SERIES II JANUARY, 1921 No. 42

With Syrian Youth



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A Spiritual Experience

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With Syrian Youth

When in 1914 Austria-Hungary declared war against Serbia, a picture was published which represented the ambassador of Germany as giving the message of his master the Kaiser to the president and premier of France in these words:— "The war must be localized or the gravest results will ensue." One of the results, not at the time in the mind of the Kaiser, was the break-up of the Ottoman Empire. Whether this result is to be credited to the inability of the Kaiser to understand the psychology of the Moslem, or to his failure to recognize an organic weakness in the Turkish Empire; or whether this does not illustrate the success of British diplomacy against Teutonic diplomacy, may not be known. But when Turkey joined the Teutonic powers she aroused against herself all the forces of disintegration within the Empire. And the first item in the break-up or failure of the Central European powers took place in the NEAR EAST. Unexpected by either side of the great conflict, the world of Islam divided against itself, and Moslem was found fighting against Moslem.

The notion of an independent Arabia had been agitated among Arabian students in Paris, and represented a hope and a desire that was only awaiting an opportune moment for its expression. Thus, when the Sultan joined with the Kaiser, the opportunity came. The Emir Feisal captured the 15,000 troops which Turkey had sent into Arabia to bind the empire together; at the same time, the Grand Shereef, his father, telegraphed the allies asking that Arabia be admitted into the family of nations; joined the Arabic forces with those of the Allies of the British, in defense of the Suez Canal; and later with the Allies entered Palestine and in 1917 was present at the capture of Jerusalem. In the next year, the allied armies, British, French, and Arabic, completed the discomfiture of the Turks, captured Beirut, Damascus, and Aleppo, and ac-

cepted the surrender of the Turkish army in October of that year (1918).

The historian of the war may defend the premise, that it was the ten days' delay at Liege that defeated the Kaiser. A Frenchman might claim that it was the defeat of the Germans at the first battle of the Marne, when the army of the Teutons was turned back from Paris. A German military official has stated that the defeat of the Germans began when they abandoned open warfare for trench warfare, although it took four years to complete the demonstration. An Italian might claim that Italy gave the finishing blow, and there is no gainsaying that Italy, three times if not oftener, did very effective service towards the assured end. We of the United States may insist that it was our two million American soldiers that made their entrance into the struggle at the Second Battle of the Marne that saved the day for the Allies. Looking more subtly for the causes of the downfall of Kaiserism, perhaps it may be found in the arousing of the moral sense of the nations, as there gradually dawned upon them, with the early successes of the Central Powers, the full meaning of the phrase, "A Treaty is a Scrap of Paper." I think that I can see the bearing of all these claims upon the result. And I am far from making a claim for Arabia as other than a factor in the outcome. Nevertheless, it is well to remind ourselves that both Sultan and Kaiser expected to corrall the two hundred million followers of Mahomet to the cause of the Teutonic-World-Empire; and that the loyalty of the Moslems of India to Great Britain, and the entrance of Arabia into alliance with the Allies, made the first marked break in the grandiose plans of the German Military Party, and that this break was followed up to the finish. Surely the fact that Moslem and Christian fought together in defence of world liberty means much in the result and ought to count for much in the discussions of the independence of Syria and Arabia. * * * *

In an essay one of my students reminded himself and his teacher, that the work of the year had been interfered with

by unexpected half-holidays. Early in the fall term we welcomed General Gouraud, hero of Verdun, commander of the American Forces on the battle line, who wears upon his breast all the signs of distinguished services that a grateful nation can confer; and in the loss of his right hand and in a lameness as he walks, shows that he has been where fighting was actual. The entrance of General Gouraud as French High Commissioner marked the passing of a mixed French-British regime and the handing of Syria to the care of France. In honor of the arrival of General Gouraud we closed school one morning in a pouring rain, so severe that the General did not leave his ship, Again the next day we went to the Port where an Oriental people received with a good deal of grace and an appropriate enthusiasm, a man and a regime not altogether welcome.

Early in January, we gave up another day to celebrate the arrival of the Emir Feisal, hero of Arabia, son of King Hussein, Grand Shereef of Mecca, who came to Syria from France, where he had been looking after Syrian and Arabian interests with the Supreme Council and with France. These Syrian students have a way of treating a teacher as though he were an elder brother, and I found myself going to the Port with an escort of youth, some wearing the fez or the tarbouche, and others with hats and caps like our own American youth. All this illustrated the democracy of these college youth, and incidentally secured for me company and a body-guard, and found for me a good place to witness the cavalcade, as in true Arabian fashion it passed rapidly through the streets, so rapidly, that we had hardly a glimpse of the man in honor of whom we had gathered. But we saw enough to get the underlying spirit of the occasion and the hour. Conspicuous among the banners were some bearing the aspirations of young Arabia and young Syria. Among these were the following:—

No Life Without Independence.

Religion Is To God, And The Country To Its People.

Long Life To Emir Feisal.

We Utterly Refuse Division And Demand The Unity Syria.

That was on Wednesday morning. On Thursday afternoon we gave up our school work to attend a reception at The Parc in honor of the Emir. Here I found myself the special guest of one student who secured for me a position where I could see to advantage the interesting running races in which beautiful Arabian horses contended. Later, my student chaperon urged me to a coign of advantage among a crowd of twenty thousand people, where I got so near His Highness, Emir Feisal, that I could have touched him as he with the French General descended to a point where they could observe the athletic events.

As that great company moved out of the Parc to follow as they might the movements of the Emir, I was glad again to have a body-guard of students, who piloted me safely through the crowds and along streets filled with moving throngs, and made momentarily exciting by the honks of cars threading their way through the streets crowded with people, vehicles, and horsemen. No one was hurt, I hardly know why not. With the courtesy that characterizes the Orient, I found myself inside a court, and a moment later within a Moslem home where we sat for a brief moment to rest and to partake of a cup of Turkish coffee, apparently always served to guests as they appear.

* *

My introduction to the story of Arabia in the war came from one of my students. He came to me one day after class, and looking me squarely in the face, as Syrian youth always do, said, "Mr. Webster, you are not fair." This was fairly startling but the lad explained, "You have told us what the Belgian, the French, the Italian, the British and your own soldiers did in the War, but you have said nothing about Arabia." As the outcome of our conversation he wrote out for me the story or history as he knew it and I used this with other material for the class. And I closed some notes upon "Arabia in the War" with an inscription which General

Allenby had placed at Dog River, at a spot where Rameses, Esarhaddon and Napoleon III had left inscriptions telling of the presence at this place of their armies. This latest one reads:—

> The British with the help of the army
> of King Hussein and a division of the French troops
> occupied Damascus and Beirut in October, 1918.

One day the boy as he came to class found this upon the board, and exclaimed, "Did you take that from my notes?" As I nodded an affirmation, he sprang to his feet and called out, "Three cheers for Syrian independence!" These were given as only a group of students could give them. Somehow I could not help thinking of the enthusiasm in America July 4, 1776, when the news was given out that the Declaration of Independence had been signed.

It was our good fortune to meet as we sailed from Italy to Egypt an English gentleman who could not say enough in praise of America. "America has taught the world how to handle dependencies." He was not satisfied to say this once but repeated himself. Here is the underlying reason for desiring an American Mandatory. America will work to develop the nation to the point where it can be independent and then withdraw. The fear is, that with either France or Great Britain, colonizing will begin, and the result will be, absorption within the Empire. The same lad stopped me again one day aftewards and said:—"Did not President Wilson promise the independence of small nations? Then why does he not give us our independence?" I could only answer, "Why not?"

While the Syrian Protestant College is an American college for Syrian youth, its purpose is not to make Americans out of Syrians, but Syrians of Syrians. The college cannot propogandize either religiously or politically. We cannot enter the field of politics, but we can say some things. Two faculty addresses bore upon the qualities which Syrians must

have to be ready for independence. These addresses may be summarized as follows:—

1. Clean up your cities;
2. Learn to respect and to elevate your women;
3. Get back to your old habit of temperance;
4. Develop a system of public schools that shall give every boy and every girl an opportunity for an education;
5. Forget your racial, religious, and political differences and present to the world a united Syria.

* *

Something of the Day of Pentecost came to me daily as in my class-room I met, from the racial standpoint, Greeks, Armenians, Syrians, Arabians, Egyptians; and from the religious standpoint, Latin Catholic, Greek Catholic, Greek-Latin Catholic, Armenian, Bahist, Moslem and Druze students. These lads confess to being members of these sects much as our youth at home might confess to being Baptist, Methodist, or Presbyterian. This may be truer in the school than in the homes. But I met these students on the streets coming and going together with apparently no lines of cleavage that have developed as yet. This is one item out of the half-century of the history of the college. The college has been a great democratizing influence throughout the Near East. Beginning as a school for the sons of Syrian Christian families, to day its nearly a thousand students are more than half of them Moslem.

* *

I wish that I could picture the beauty of the campus. The stone step at the observatory is marked 104 feet, and indicates the elevation upon a promontory above the Great Sea. The college buildings in the main face the north; to the north and west lies the blue Mediterranean, blue with a blueness difficult to describe, and changing with the changing day. On the east stretch the Lebanons lifting their highest peaks eight thousand feet into the air. Here reigned Hiram, friend of David and Solomon. For months the peaks are snow covered. At sunset frequently these mountains have a glow similar to that

which makes the Alps famous. But the Alpine Glow cannot be more beautiful than the Lebanon Glow. Here under these majestic mountains the Syrian youth learn "the gentle art of living together." They have all the enthusiasm of other youth to whom even a nearer past is ancient history. They have the forward look even as do other youth whom I have met in classes far removed from Beirut, youth to whom will be committed the world that is to be.

There came into my hand the picture of a Syrian lad clad in the uniform of a lieutenant in the Turkish army into which he was commandeered. I compare it with another picture of another lad who in America wore the uniform of an officer, and lent his force against the cause the first was compelled to defend. Two lads were in the Syrian College, one of them in the Bulgarian, and one in the Greek army. Upon comparing notes, they found that they were opposing each other in the same great battle. They have forgotten their differences in the common life of the school. Would that their comradeship might be prophetic of a World at Peace.

(The article above was written while in Syria.)

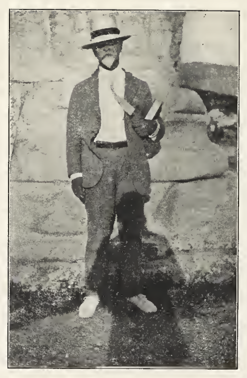
It was our privilege to be in Damascus during the Easter holidays. At that time the Arabic government had been established with Damascus as its capital. This attempt at a national government was established to forestall action on the part of the Supreme Council, the Arabs being impatient of the delay in adjusting the affairs of the Near East from Paris. The Arabs in the University were very happy over this nationalistic movement. Personally, I would not have recommended the movement, for I did not see a prospect of its ultimate success. But I felt a great sympathy for the students and a great interest in their enthusiasm. Busied elsewhere at the time the French apparently took no notice of this establishment of a Syrian Kingdom. One of my students as a Boy Scout was in Damascus in the summer and was made very

happy over a reception by King Feisal, and came away with a great affection for the King and a consecration to the cause of Syrian Independence.

Not long after a French division appeared at Damascus, a short but sharp battle ensued in which the Syrian army was defeated, and the ambitious little kingdom was overrun by the French. Syria is now divided into three parts:—Aleppo, with the city of Aleppo, as capital; Syria, with Damascus as capital; and Greater Lebanon, with Beyrouth as capital. Perhaps all this was wrapped up in the necessities of the case. At any rate, this is the present situation. From my point of view, I think that the French, supported by the English, would have done well to have encouraged an independent Syrian Kingdom under the moral support of the Allies. Such a state would have been friendly disposed toward the powers that permitted and helped toward its erection. It would have been a "buffer" state between the Near East and the Further East.

I quote from a letter from a student, the letter hardly a month old (Dec. 10, 1920). "And now comes the most important event taking place, 'The Big Islam.' Islam is awakening in the East and in the West, that is, in Turkey, Arabia, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Anatolia and India." It was the division of Islam into two camps as stated in the body of this article that gave the first real blow to the Teutonic dream. The lad from whom I quote is only a lad in a way; but he is on the inside; and he speaks for a large constituency. A happy community of Syrian Moslems in the heart of the Near East would have been a center of friendly folk in the settlement of problems growing out of the war. A disaffected community may similarly become a center of further disaffection that may long delay the world hopes of adjustments such as we hoped the conclusion of the war might bring about.

—Edgar H. Webster.



Prof. Edgar H. Webster
Taken in July, 1920, at Athens, by one of the columns that remain of the Olympeion. The photographer is a Greek student who became a valued friend.



The Winners of the Football Pennant,
Syrian Protestant College, Preparatory Department, 1920



Knowles Industrial Building—Atlanta University



Boys' Dormitory—Atlanta University

A Spiritual Experience

As given under Miss Ware's direction, the Open Door Pageant is more than a musical and dramatic entertainment; it is a spiritual experience for the participants and to some extent for the spectators. It posseses a genuine quality like that of the old folk plays and dances in which people used to take part for the sheer pleasure of it, or like that of the Passion Play, where to participate was an act of worship. Those who take part in the pageant are not merely acting a part to please the audience; they are living over again the yearnings and sufferings, the sorrows and hopes of a race. And so far the audiences seem to have been caught up by the same spirit and carried away by the contagion of it.

Two incidents will illustrate what I mean; one in Atlanta, one in Boston. In Atlanta the audience was made up largely of former students of Atlanta University. They followed the pageant with eager interest. They could understand the oppression of Ignorance, Greed and Prejudice. They could feel with Education in her efforts to overcome these baleful influences, and when finally, under the guidance of Truth, Beauty and Love, she led her pupils in triumph through The Open Door, the audience was seized by an irrisistible impulse. "Come on," they said, "we are students of Atlanta University, too." "Let us go up through the Open Door with the rest." And they did, singing with the chorus,

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who hast by Thy might,
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.

The audience caught the message and then acted by common impulse. It was a spiritual experience.

In Boston Miss Ware chose, to take the part of Education, a young woman who protested that she had had no experience

but who was willing to try. At rehearsals she followed with meticulous care every suggestion, making this gesture or that, doing thus and so, exactly as she was told. But the effect was wooden and it seemed as though she could never be ready to take the part. "The only way that you can succeed," she was told, "is by catching the spirit of your part. How would you feel toward this group of slaves, if you were indeed the queenly Mother who could lead them out of suffering and darkness into hope and joy?" And in one of the last rehearsals she did catch the spirit; the transformation was like a miracle; she became the very personification of gracious solicitude and loving strength, an ideal Alma Mater. After the first performance the other characters came crowding about her with their congratulations. "Oh Education, you were wonderful; you did your part beautifully." But she answered, quite simply, "I didn't do it, God did it." And in some such way all the participants seem to have caught the spirit and message of the Pageant of the Open Door, and it has been for these, as for Education, a spiritual experience.

—EDWARD T. WARE.

Dark Faces

Written by a young woman after seeing the Pageant in Symphony Hall.

The Men

Face of a thinker, serene of eye and brow;
Chin firm-chiselled with resolve to seek the truth;
Eyes deep and calm, yet wistful for a breath
As his soul looks shyly through to meet the world;
Then baffled, puzzled not to be received
By hearts as kind and open as his own,
The thought deserts the windows of the soul
And deeper lines are carved about his lips
Sealed tight upon the torture of his mind.

The Women

Faces supreme in Motherhood and love
Shine with an all-enfolding care
That good may come; their longings rise above
The prejudice and mocking everywhere.
Deep-breasted, and no less deep-hearted, they
Would gather in their arms the hurts and wrongs
Of all child-hearts, and croon their ills away
With tender, mother yearning in their songs.

The Children

Little eager faces, seeking thru the years,—
Tiny hands stretched upward—
Little eyes turned forward—
Seeking life and love; they do not know of tears.
Little children's voices, and laughter in the air—
Still they laugh, their laughter
Leaving sadness after—
For us, who know so well their hopelessness of prayer.

A Meritorious Cause

From the Boston Herald

To the Editor of *The Herald:*

May I call attention to the Negro pageant, "The Open Door," which is to have its second performance at Symphony Hall on the evening of Wednesday, Dec. 8. Many friends of Atlanta University, for the benefit of which this pageant has been prepared, attended the first performance with some apprehension that it might prove too ambitious an undertaking for unskilled amateurs. What they saw was a scene which can only be described as overwhelming in its artistic and emotional appeal, a plan admirably conceived, a dignified and touching symbolism, a harmony of song with act, and a participation by hundreds of performers in processions, tableaux, dances and music, without self-consciousness or inadequacy at a single point. It was an occasion, not for condescending sympathy, but rather for unqualified admiration of the dramatic instinct, rhythmic movement and statuesque dignity which are among the peculiar gifts of the colored race. Symphony Hall was packed at the first performance and should be crowded again.

—Francis G. Peabody.

Cambridge, Dec. 5.

The Phelps-Stokes Fund

There has recently been published a 92-page report of the ten years' work of the Phelps-Stokes fund. It is by the Educational Director of the Fund, Dr. Thomas Jesse Jones, and is entitled "Educational Adaptations."

The work of this Fund has been exceptionally valuable. It was founded by Miss Caroline Phelps Stokes, and eight pages of the report are given to a sketch of her life. The history and policy of the Fund are sketched interestingly. The bequest directs that the income shall be used "in the education of Negroes both in Africa and the United States, North American Indians, and needy and deserving white students." Those who have administered the fund have striven to obtain and give accurate information, to encourage helpful educational movements, and to promote harmonious race relationships.

Up to date the most conspicuous work of this fund has been its scientific investigation into 747 Negro educational institutions, which was printed by the United States Bureau of Education in two volumes, Nos. 38 and 39, entitled "The Bulletin on Negro Education." This work is universally recognized as being standard, and a basis upon which must be built practically all consideration of the subject of Negro education. Other features of the work include cooperative efforts between the races, cooperation with educational and religious agencies, fellowships, publicity, methods of accounting and keeping records, the encouragement of efforts to promote education in all ways possible, and to some extent also direct appropriations are made to established institutions for their educational work.

All who are interested in Negro education will find this report illuminating and helpful.

It is interesting to note that Dr. Jones is now in Africa as head of the African Education Commission, which is making a study of the educational needs of equatorial and West Africa.

The Commission has already visited Sierra Leone and Liberia, and is now in the Cameroun. The report of this Commision will be awaited with much interest.

The Washington Alumni Meeting

The Atlanta University Club of Washington, D. C., had a program in memory of our founder and first president Edmund Asa Ware, in the Lincoln Congregational Temple on the night of Sunday December 12. The services were very interesting and the graduates in Washington feel much gratified at the success of their effort. The principal address was made by J. Stanley Durkee, D.D., President of Howard University. Other participants on the program were T. M. Dent '80, the president of the club, L. M. Hershaw '86, one of our trustees, Jacob G. Hutchins '78, Mrs. Fannie Howard Douglas '05, Isaac O. Westmoreland'07, and Mrs. Georgia Douglas Johnson '93. We append the poem of Mrs. Johnson which was read on this occasion. Mrs. Johnson is the author of a number of poems, many of which have been collected in book form in "The Heart of a Woman." We congratulate our Washington alumni on this interesting and sucessful effort.

To Atlanta University—Its Founders and Teachers

Pass down the aisle of buried years tonight,
And stand uncovered in that holy place
Where noble structures lift their hallowed height
Beneath a bending heaven's chaste embrace,
The fruit of those who scorned the path of ease,
To buckle on the armaments of care—
Like to the Son of Man himself, were these
Who gave themselves for brother men—less fair.

Before the blinding footlights of today
We man our parts within life's tragic play
Full mindful of the earnest love and care
That keeps eternal watch and vigil there;
Nor do they need fair monuments and scrolls—
Their memories are deathless in our souls.

THE CREATION

"A Negro Sermon," by James W. Johnson, '94. Reprinted from *The Freeman*.

And God stepped out on space,
And He looked around and said,
"I'm lonely—
I'll make me a world."

And far as the eye of God could see
Darkness covered everything,
Blacker than a hundred midnights
Down in a cypress swamp.

Then God smiled,
And the light broke,
And the darkness rolled upon one side,
And the light stood shining on the other,
And God said, *"That's good!"*

Then God reached out and took the light in His hands,
And God rolled the light around in His hands
Until He made the sun;
And He set that sun a-blazing in the heavens.
And the light that was left from making the sun
God gathered it up in a shining ball
And flung it against the darkness,
Spangling the night with the moon and stars.
Then down between
The darkness and the light
He hurled the world;
And God said, *"That's good!"*

Then God himself stepped down—
And the sun was on His right hand,
And the moon was on His left;
The stars were clustered above His head,
And the earth was under His feet.
And God walked, and where He trod
His footsteps hollowed the valleys out
And bulged the mountains up,

Then He stopped and looked and saw
That the earth was hot and barren,
So God stepped over to the edge of the world
And He spat out the seven seas;
He batted His eyes, and the lightnings flashed;

He clapped His hands, and the thunder rolled;
And the waters about the earth came down,
The cooling waters came down.

Then the green grass sprouted,
And the little red flowers blossomed,
The pine tree pointed his finger to the sky,
And the oak spread out his arms,
The lakes cuddled down in the hollows of the ground,
And the rivers ran down to the sea;
And God smiled again,
And the rainbow appeared,
And curled itself around His shoulder.

Then God raised His arm and He waved His hand
Over the sea and over the land,
And He said, "Bring forth! Bring forth!"
And quicker than God could drop His hand,
Fishes and fowls,
And beasts and birds
Swam the rivers and the seas,
Roamed the forests and the woods,
And split the air with their wings.
And God said, *"That's good!"*

Then God walked around,
And God looked around
On all that He had made.
He looked at His sun,
And He looked at His moon,
And he looked at His little stars;
He looked on His world
With all its living things,
And God said, *"I'm lonely still."*

Then God sat down
On the side of a hill where He could think;
By a deep wide river He sat down;
With His head in His hands,
God thought and thought,
Till He thought, *"I'll make me a man!"*
Up from the bed of the river
God scooped the clay;
And by the banks of the river
He kneeled Him down;

And there the great God Almighty,
Who lit the sun and fixed it in the sky,
Who flung the stars to the most far corner of the night,
Who rounded the earth in the middle of his hand;
This Great God,
Like a mammy bending over her baby,
Kneeled down in the dust
Toiling over a lump of clay
Till He shaped it in His own image;
Then into it He blew the breath of life,
And man became a living soul.
Amen. Amen.

The Tribute Of A Former Student

In the last issue of the Bulletin we referred to the work of A. W. Nicholson, who for over thirty years has been at the head of Bettis Academy at Trenton, S. C. A letter from Mr. Nicholson contains the following appreciation of the work of Atlanta University: "All that I have been able to accomplish of good—and thank God I have been able to accomplish much that is perceptible and permanent—has, in the greater measure, been done according to and in harmony with the ideals of service instilled in my heart and impressed upon my mind at the ever blessed A. U."

'76 On the 25th of November there was celebrated in Savannah the fiftieth anniversary of the entry of Richard R. Wright upon his career as a teacher. President Wright has been the the only president of the Georgia State Industrial College during its history. Even before his graduation he was engaged in teaching, and has served continuously in this field of activity since his graduation. He has also done editorial work, held the rank of Major during the Spanish American War, and in many ways has been active in promoting the advancement of his people.

'83 Oswell A. Combs has been elected president of Campbell College, Jackson, Mississippi, thus adding another name to the list of present and past college presidents who have come from this institution.

'89 (non-graduate) Dr. Archibald J. Carey was at the last Conference elected a bishop of the A. M. E. Church. His services to his church have been largely in Chicago, and have been very effective. He is the third bishop from among our former students, the others being Joseph S. Flipper, also of the A. M. E. Church, and Charles H. Phillips, of the C. M. E. Church.



There is especially due to the colored race a more general recognition of their constitutional rights. Tempted with disloyalty they remained loyal, serving on the military forces with distinction, obedient to the draft to the extent of hundreds of thousands, investing one dollar out of every five dollars they possessed in Liberty bonds. Surely they hold the title of citizenship—to be relieved from all imposition, to be defended from lynching, and to be freely granted equal opportunities.

—*Calvin Coolidge.*

